

***Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area***

*United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service  
and*

*California Department of Parks and Recreation, State Parks*

**Heart-of-the-Park  
Shuttle Demonstration Project  
Draft Environmental Assessment/Initial Study**



***April 8, 2002***

## **PROPOSED NEGATIVE DECLARATION (CEQA)**

### **Project Title**

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area – Heart-of-the-Park Shuttle Demonstration Project

### **Description**

The National Park Service (NPS) is proposing to implement a tourist shuttle system that would serve many popular sites within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA). The “Heart-of-the-Park” Demonstration Shuttle Project is a one-year, weekend service only program that would use mini-buses to travel in a bi-directional loop around the central part of the Park using Malibu Canyon Road, the Pacific Coast Highway, Kanan Dume Road, and the Mulholland Highway. The purpose of the Demonstration Shuttle Project would be to determine how well a park shuttle transit system could solve some of the most serious transportation challenges such as roadway congestion, lack of accessibility, limited parking, and improving visitor experience. The projected annual ridership for the Demonstration Program is 23,500 to 30,500 passengers for the first year of operation.

The proposed project is located within the boundaries of unincorporated Los Angeles county, the city of Malibu, and several federal and state-owned parklands. Local land uses include open space, residential, commercial, and coastal zone.

### **Determination**

The California Department of Parks and Recreation (California State Parks or CSP) has evaluated potential project impacts related to the Heart-of-the-Park Shuttle Demonstration Project as documented in the attached Initial Study and proposes to determine that there is no substantial evidence, in light of the whole record before the agency, that the project would cause any significant adverse impacts.

# FOREWARD

## ***NATIONAL PARK SERVICE STAFF SUMMARY: The Planning Process and Major Issues from the Public and Governmental Agencies***

**Public Input.** The National Park Service (NPS) has undertaken an extensive effort to gather public and agency input on transportation in the Santa Monica Mountains in general, and more specifically, on the proposed Shuttle System analyzed in this environmental document. Over the last two years the planning process has included an extensive visitor survey with interviews of over 600 individuals at 18 county, state and federal park sites; agency charrette and planning meetings; informal discussions with agency staff; briefings with local elected officials; two focus groups representing both existing local activists as well as non-users from the L.A. region; a public scoping meeting; and the review of agency and public comments received via email, letter and telephone. Responses indicate a strong interest in a shuttle system serving multiple park sites. Transportation alternatives are badly needed in order to mitigate the environmental impacts of millions of annual visits to park sites within the National Recreation Area.

**Resources and Challenges.** The valuable input obtained through the processes referenced above has led directly to the creation of the shuttle system proposal that is analyzed in this document. One theme that emerged from the more recent public input was that the demonstration phase should be more ambitious in terms of providing a unique appeal through high-quality facilities and vehicles. This theme was repeated in discussions with two focus groups, at a public scoping meeting and in an extensive letter from transit advocate John Jay Ulloth. The National Park Service staff at the SMMNRA therefore continues to advocate for additional resources for this project. However, the NPS Alternative Transportation Program and partner agencies that may fund this project are practical and somewhat cautious in terms of limiting the investment during a demonstration phase. The Alternative Transportation Program will provide funding for capital facilities and vehicle purchases, but will not fund purchase of specialized vehicles for the demonstration phase. The challenge is to generate enough ridership to sustain a permanent system by putting forth an attractive package made up of frequent service and the facilities and other features desired by potential riders.

Another part of the financial challenge is the need to cover operating costs through a partnership anticipated to include, at a minimum, the National Park Service, California State Parks and Los Angeles County. On a very positive note, the senior NPS staff in Washington, D.C. anticipates that forthcoming transportation legislation may greatly increase the Alternative Transportation Program in terms of total dollars and eligible activities. The upcoming federal transportation reauthorization, "TEA-22" or whatever name is given to the successor to the 1998 Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century--TEA-21, may be a great impetus to this project and its eventual expansion.

**Interconnection and Expansion.** The shuttle project as proposed offers direct linkage with Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) service along the Pacific Coast. Specifically, it will overlap and be timed to coordinate with Route 434 local bus service that links to the Santa Monica Pier area as well as to downtown Los Angeles. A significant amount of public input was directed at potential expansion of the proposal or expansion of services by other agencies that would link to the proposed Heart-of-the-Park shuttle route. Most of these ideas are currently viewed as prime opportunities once a successful demonstration project is established. However, these additional routes would require funding for additional vehicles and operating overhead, and they are therefore outside the scope and purpose of the current demonstration project. The most significant or frequently requested expansion proposals are listed below:

- ❑ Expansion by MTA to run Community Shuttle feeder service in the Calabasas and Agoura areas and/or extension of Route 161 to Malibu Creek State Park
- ❑ A connecting route expansion to the MTA Valley Rapid (bus rapid transit) node at Ventura and Topanga Canyon Boulevards in the San Fernando Valley. (Limited runs morning and afternoon would be acceptable.)
- ❑ Connecting routes that would expand the proposal and serve the following locations:
  - The Santa Monica Pier
  - Temescal Gateway Park
  - Cheeseboro Palo Comado Canyon Trailhead
  - Cities of Agoura Hills and Westlake Village municipal centers
  - Malibu Pier (The project as proposed provides service to nearby Malibu Lagoon State Beach, but agreement was not reached on a satisfactory means that would allow for access and a signalized turn-around on Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) for the shuttle bus at the very constrained Malibu Pier redevelopment site.)

**Additional Project Notes:**

1. Another topic of public input has been the need for Park and Ride locations on the Pacific Coast. As with most of the facilities used to serve the proposed system, this would involve the shared use of existing parking, especially for the demonstration phase. Initial efforts to identify sites have not been productive, although there are possibilities such as property owned by Los Angeles County, the City of Malibu and others. This is an area that must be pursued as the project continues beyond the environmental review stage and into design of facilities and the procurement of a contract for service. Somewhat longer term possibilities for Park and Ride locations on the coast include the development of the joint NPS-State Parks Visitor Center at the large Malibu Bluffs site.

2. Many pages of materials from the public input phase containing comments, meeting summaries and related items were included as Appendix E in the preliminary agency draft of the EA/IS (March 22, 2002). These documents are available for review at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Visitor's Center (401 West Hillcrest Drive / Thousand Oaks, CA 91360), but were not included in the Draft EA/IS in order to save paper.

3. Engineering survey work was not an eligible activity in procuring the current task order contract with Parsons Brinckerhoff. This contract includes the Environmental Assessment/Initial Study, the conceptual facility designs contained herein, and other tasks. The best available topographic or as-built site plan information was used in lieu of new field survey. Engineering survey with up-to-date site conditions will be completed prior to the initiation of design and construction documents.